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AUTHOR Thistle, Maureen; O'Connor, James E.
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ABSTRACT

Findings of a study that examined the attitudes of middle level teachers and principals toward middle-school certification are presented in this paper. Questionnaires were sent to 82 teachers and principals of all 46 public schools serving sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade students in Kern County, California. Twenty-four principals and 48 teachers responded. The data suggest that although middle-grade teachers and principals generally agreed on how a middle-school certificate should be granted and what classes should be required, they agreed less on who should be required to obtain a special middle-school certificate. Whether or not a respondent favored middle-school certification appeared to be directly related to the respondent's educational position. For example, principals tended to favor teacher certification and teachers favored certification for principals. The findings may illustrate a reason why midlevel teachers and principals have been slow to recognize the need for middle-school certification. Six tables and a copy of the questionnaire are included. (Contains 22 references.) (LMI)

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MIDDLE SCHOOL CERTIFICATION:

A COMPARISON OF TEACHERS' AND PRINCIPALS' ATTITUDES

Maureen Thistle, M.A.
Beardsley School District
Bakersfield, California

and

James E. O'Connor, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Department of Teacher Education
California State University, Bakersfield

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INTRODUCTION

The scarcity of properly trained principals, counselors, and teachers has been a source of national and state concern confronting middle schools across the United States. According to middle school researchers, Alexander and McEwin (1989), over half of the middle grade schools surveyed in 1988 described their faculties as ones in which less than 25% of the teachers had any university training specific to teaching young adolescents. The Carnegie Corporation Council Task Force on Education of Adolescent Development in Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century (1989) addresses eight recommendations for reforming the education of young adolescents. The fifth of these recommendations specifically states:

> "Staff middle grade schools with teachers who are expert at teaching young adolescents and who have been specially prepared for assignment to the middle grades." (p. 58)

California's State Superintendent of Schools task force report, Caught in the Middle: Educational Reform for Young Adolescents in California Public Schools (California State Department of Education, 1987) has also addressed middle school teacher preparation and certification as one of the highest priorities to promote middle school reform in grades 6, 7, and 8 to gain momentum in California and become successful nationwide as well. This state task force recommends and states:

> "The Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) and institutions of higher education (IHE) which provide teacher/administrator preparation programs should ensure that candidates for K-8 and 7-12 teaching and administrative credentials are more effectively prepared for assignments to grades 6, 7, and 8." (p. 118).

Increasing numbers of states are establishing special middle level teacher certification programs. A certification survey of state education agencies made by McEwin in 1987, yielded information regarding the existence of special middle level certification requirements (full certification and/or endorsement) in 28 states (NMSA, 1981). By contrast, only two states had such requirements in 1968, and only 15 states in 1978 (Alexander and McEwin, 1984). In addition to the 28 states now requiring middle level certification, nine other states reported that certification was under study. Of these, six states are considering establishing special middle level certification standards: Idaho, Maryland, New Hampshire, Ohio, Tennessee, and Vermont. Only five states reported special certification requirements for middle level principals: Colorado, Kentucky, North Dakota, Rhode Island, and Virginia. Surprisingly, only three states require special middle level certification standards for counselors: Kentucky, Minnesota and Virginia (Alexander and McEwin, 1988).

National, as well as state concern, about middle school reform has contributed to increased research interest during the past twelve years in the area of middle school certification.

Concern in recent years regarding special certification has led many researchers to administer attitudinal questionnaires to investigate educator's beliefs about middle grade certification. According to

Alexander and McEwin (1984, 1988 & 1989) poorly prepared and uncommitted personnel cannot do the job required at the middle level and the lack of teachers trained for the middle grades has long been viewed as an obstacle to the growth of developmentally responsive schools. Some believe that the inadequate middle school preparation is related to the lack of middle school state certification such as in California, Caught in the Middle (1987). State certification requirements along with college and university programs of study for teachers in that area of specialization is recommended by both state and national adolescent development task forces Caught in the Middle (1987), and Turning Points (1989). Many studies have in fact been done to investigate the possible agreement between educators currently employed in a middle school about middle school certification issues.

DeMedio and Mazur-Stewart (NASSP Bulletin, 1990), for example, found that both teachers and principals supported special middle school certification for counselors and teachers; however, teachers support certification for principals, whereas principals, not surprisingly, do not. Both groups support obtaining special certification through additional coursework more than through a degree. Moreover, these researchers arrived at the conclusion that both groups strongly favored the study of discipline and middle school child development, along with middle grade field experiences for an appropriate preparation program.

Additionally, research conducted by DeMedio and Kish (1980) in the area of middle school certification/preparation indicated that middle school teachers and principals favored certification, but those working in elementary and secondary schools did not. Data from this study also revealed a genuine need for special middle school certification for

counselors. Furthermore, one of the areas in which researchers have done investigations concerning middle grade certification relates to the following question: "What ingredients should make up the teacher training program?"

George and McEwin (1978) reported among other findings that a relatively complete consensus has developed concerning the characteristics of effective middle school teacher education programs. General standards for middle level preparation programs called "essential elements" were proposed by National Middle School Association (NMSA) in 1986. These have, in turn, become the foundation for criteria developed by NMSA for the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (Kramer, McKibbin and Dumas, 1990). And, according to these writers, beginning in 1992, all middle level teacher education programs must meet NMSA/NCATE criteria.

Gillan (1978), DeMedio and Kish (1980), DeMedio and Mazur-Stewart (1990) found no significant differences between the attitudes of teachers and principals toward middle grade certification. Responses from both teachers and principals to their questionnaires indicated a need for a separate certification for the middle school teacher. According to Kramer, McKibbin and Dumas (1990), teaching staffs are the key to the successful implementation of middle school reforms. Middle school faculties, today, are comprised mainly of teachers with secondary, subject-specific credentials.

In summary, researchers who have investigated the attitudes of principals and teachers toward middle school certification through an attitudinal questionnaire in the past ten years have found that teachers and principals support middle school certification but do not share

agreement on who should be required to possess a special middle school certification.

Although there is little doubt among leaders of the middle school movement that there is an urgent need for middle school certification in all states (Bondi and Wiles, 1986), this view is not shared by all educators (DeMedio, 1980). Consequently, as noted, questions concerning the need for middle school certification still remain. Of these questions one seems paramount. "What are the attitudes of teachers and principals working in middle schools and other schools containing six through eight toward middle school certification?"

The purpose of this study is to determine the attitudes toward middle school certification among teachers and principals in middle, elementary and secondary schools containing grades six, seven, and eight. Middle school certification is defined as specific certification requirements, separate and/or different from elementary and secondary certification requirements, for middle school personnel.

METHODS OF THE STUDY

The Population and Sample

Subjects for this study were selected from the population of principals and teachers at 46 public schools serving sixth, seventh, eighth (or a combination of two) grade students in Kern County. These schools are classified as elementary, junior high, or middle school. The available population of all the employed principals was 46. Since this was a small number, all 46 of the principals were surveyed. The target population of middle level teachers was 819. The desired sample

proportion of teachers was 10%, therefore, 82 teachers were randomly sampled. The same questionnaire was sent to the principals and to these teachers in order to investigate their attitudes concerning middle school certification.

Instrument

A National Survey measuring attitudes of educators toward middle grade certification (see appendix) was the instrument used for this study. This questionnaire is similar in content to a previous middle school certification survey developed by teams of teachers, principals, and college professors from Northwestern, Ohio (DeMedio and Mazur-Stewart, 1990). Permission was granted by Dr. DeMedio to use this national survey. It is composed of 21 items derived from middle school certification programs throughout the country and is constructed using a Likert scale to measure each of the items. In this scale, five responses were provided--strongly agree, agree, no opinion, disagree, and strongly disagree. Points were assigned for each of these five responses--strongly agree (5 points), agree (4 points), no opinion (3 points), disagree (2 points), and strongly disagree (1 point).

The questionnaire is divided into three parts. Part I contains 3 items designed to measure the respondents' opinions regarding which types of faculty members should receive special middle grade certification. Part II contains 2 items which were designed to measure opinions regarding how certification should be granted. Part III presents 17 items which were designed to measure opinions regarding specific areas that should be covered during certification preparation.

The Methods and Procedures

All 46 of the principals in the sample were surveyed in this study. Eighty-two (10%) of the 819 middle level teachers were also surveyed. Both groups received the same questionnaire designed to measure their attitudes toward middle school certification. The 1990-91 Kern County Superintendent of Schools Directory was used to identify the schools for the study. The 46 schools were selected by their middle level grade classification. In this sample, 6 of the schools are categorized as inner city schools, 24 of the schools are located outside of Bakersfield city limits and 16 are within the city limits. In May 1991, the questionnaires were mailed to these schools via Kern County Superintendent of Schools' mail route. Each principal was to receive at least one questionnaire for himself/herself as well as any additional questionnaires provided for teachers at that site who may have been randomly selected. Each individual questionnaire included a cover letter which briefly explained the nature and purpose of the study, provided the directions, and detailed importance of their support and cooperation in completing and returning the questionnaire as soon as possible. To avoid requiring subjects to be responsible for any mailing costs, a self-addressed return envelope was included with each individual questionnaire. Twenty-four surveys were returned from principals and forty-eight were returned from teachers.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The two groups were not significantly different in regards to the first three items on the questionnaire pertaining to who should receive a middle grade certification.

Table 1

Summary of Results of part I: Responses Toward Middle School Certification of Principals, Counselors, and Teachers

Group	Mean	S.D.	N^S	T Score
Teachers	9.625	3.14	48	.912
Principals	8.916	3.05	24	

T Score = .912 < 2.00 with 72 degrees of freedom and is not significant at .05 level.

Note: the t table does not have df = 72. To be conservative, I used df = 60. For df = 60 and p = .05, the table value is 2.000.

Data presented in Table 2 show responses to questions about whether there should be special certification requirements separate from elementary and secondary certification requirements for middle school personnel. Teachers' and principals' responses were different for items pertaining to middle grade principals and counselors, but not for the item pertaining to middle grade teachers.

Teachers supported the concept that middle grade principals should obtain special certification to a greater degree than principals did.

Approximately 46 percent of the teachers either agreed or strongly agreed with special principal certification, while 38 percent either disagreed or strongly disagreed. On the other hand, approximately 38 percent of the principals either agreed or strongly agreed, while 50 percent either disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Teachers gave more support to the idea that middle grade counselors should obtain special certification than principals did. Approximately 67 percent of the teachers either agreed or strongly agreed with special certification requirements for counselors, whereas 29 percent either disagreed or strongly disagreed. Thirty-eight percent of the principals either agreed or strongly agreed, while 50 percent either disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Table 2

Percentage of Responses to Item Categories Toward Certification of Middle Grade Personnel

Certification should be required for:	% Strongly Agree	% Agree	% No Opinion	% Disagree	% Strongly Disagree
Principals					
Teachers	10.4	35.4	11.6	29.2	8.4
Principals	16.7	20.8	12.5	29.2	20.8
Counselors					
Teachers	16.6	50.0	4.2	22.9	6.3
Principals	16.7	20.8	12.5	41.7	8.3
Teachers					
Teachers	14.6	27.1	6.3	35.4	16.6
Principals	25.0	20.8	8.3	33.3	12.6

Table 3 displays data about Part II which includes how middle grade certification should be accomplished. No significant differences were found between the groups of respondents. Teachers and principals did not differ significantly as to whether there should be middle school certification.

Table 3

Summary of Results of Part II: Responses Toward How Middle Grade Certification Should be Accomplished

Group	Mean	S.D.	N^S	T Score
Teachers	5.65	2.40	48	-.565
Principals	6.00	2.50	24	

T Score = -0.565 < 2.00 with 72 degrees of freedom and is not significant at .05 level.

Principals supported the granting of middle grade certification through a special degree slightly more than did teachers. About 38 percent of the principals either agreed or strongly agreed with special degree certification, while 50 percent either disagreed or strongly disagreed; and 31 percent of the teachers either agreed or strongly agreed, while 54 percent either disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Both groups gave greater support to granting middle grade certification through additional coursework. Fifty-two percent of the teachers and 47 percent of the principals either agreed or strongly

disagreed with using courses, while 40 percent of the teachers and another 38 percent of the principals either disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Table 4

Percentage of Responses to Item Categories Toward Implementation of Middle Grade Certification

Certification should be acquired by:	% Strongly Agree	% Agree	% No Opinion	% Disagree	% Strongly Disagree
A special degree					
Teachers	4.2	27.1	16.6	37.5	16.6
Principals	16.7	20.8	12.5	33.3	16.7
Additional courses					
Teachers	10.4	41.7	8.4	22.9	16.6
Principals	20.8	26.0	16.7	20.8	16.7

Additionally, there was no significant difference found between the two groups in regard to the implementation of middle grade certification.

Table 5

Summary of Results of Part III: Responses Toward Middle School Certification Preparation/Required Courses

Group	Mean	S.D.	N^S	T Score
Teachers	64.77	8.133	48	2.063
Principals	66.083	8.304	24	

T Score = -2.063 < 2.000 with 72 degrees of freedom and is not significant at .05 level.

Data indicating attitudes toward content and experiences that should be included as part of middle grade certification preparation are displayed in Table 6. Including "development of middle grade children" was the most popular response, with 42 percent of the teachers and 63 percent of the principals strongly agreeing. The second most popular choice for certification preparation was principles of classroom management (discipline), with strong support given by 52 percent of the teachers and 50 percent of the principals.

Having a variety of teaching strategies (methods) was the third most popular response, with 46 percent of the teachers and 54 percent of the principals strongly agreeing.

Between 38 and 50 percent of the teachers and principals strongly agreed with incorporating the psychology of learning and behavior applied to middle grade students as well as field experiences prior to student teaching in certification preparation. Content area reading

responses were significantly different; principals gave stronger support than teachers for the item.

Less support was given for affective education, special teaching methods, psychology of middle grade children, and principles of guidance and counseling applied to middle grade children. Between 29 and 19 percent of the teachers and principals strongly supported these items.

The least popular areas were the remedial reading, methods of individualized instruction, the same teaching methods given elementary and secondary teachers, and history, philosophy, and purposes of middle grade education. Only 8 and 21 percent of the teachers and principals strongly agreed.

Table 6

Percentage of Responses to Item Categories Toward Middle Grade Certification Preparation/Course Requirements

Courses that should be required:	% Strongly Agree	% Agree	% No Opinion	% Disagree	% Strongly Disagree
A variety of teaching strategies (methods)					
Teachers	45.85	50.0	4.15	0	0
Principals	54.1	41.7	0	4.2	0
Principals of classroom management (discipline)					
Teachers	52.0	41.7	4.2	2.1	0
Principals	50.0	45.8	0	4.2	0
Development of middle grade children					
Teachers	41.7	47.9	4.2	6.2	0
Principals	62.5	33.3	0	4.2	0

Table 6 (continued)

Courses that should be required:	% Strongly Agree	% Agree	% No Opinion	% Disagree	% Strongly Disagree
Psychology of learning and behavior applied to middle grade children					
Teachers	37.5	47.9	6.25	8.35	0
Principals	45.8	50.0	0	4.2	0
Special teaching methods in middle grades					
Teachers	18.7	62.5	8.4	10.4	0
Principals	29.2	58.3	8.3	4.2	0
Principles of guidance and counseling applied to middle grade children					
Teachers	18.7	62.5	8.4	10.4	0
Principals	20.85	66.65	4.2	8.3	0
Affective education					
Teachers	29.15	50.0	14.6	6.25	0
Principals	25.0	58.3	4.2	8.3	0
Psychology of middle grade children					
Teachers	16.6	64.6	4.2	14.6	0
Principals	29.2	50.0	8.3	8.3	4.2
Reading in the content area applied to middle grade teaching					
Teachers	14.6	54.2	16.6	14.6	0
Principals	25.0	58.3	12.5	4.2	0
Learning theory/ psychology in the classroom					
Teachers	14.6	58.35	14.6	12.45	0
Principals	29.2	45.8	16.7	4.15	4.15

Table 6 (continued)

Courses that should be required:	% Strongly Agree	% Agree	% No Opinion	% Disagree	% Strongly Disagree
Methods of individualized instruction					
Teachers	12.5	52.1	16.6	14.6	4.2
Principals	12.5	70.8	0	16.7	0
Field experiences prior to student teaching					
Teachers	37.5	25.0	16.65	18.75	2.1
Principals	50.0	33.3	4.2	8.3	4.2
The same teaching methods given elementary and secondary teachers					
Teachers	16.65	50.0	12.5	20.85	0
Principals	8.3	58.3	16.7	16.7	0
History, philosophy, and purposes of middle grade education					
Teachers	16.6	33.3	22.95	18.7	8.45
Principals	20.85	45.8	20.85	8.3	4.2
Remedial reading					
Teachers	10.4	33.3	29.2	25.0	2.1
Principals	16.7	45.8	25.0	8.3	4.2

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this study clearly show that while middle grade teachers and principals agree more on how a middle school certification should be granted and specifically what classes should be required, they agree less, however, on who should be required to obtain a special middle school certification.

In terms of special types of certification, the study reveals three major findings. First, there is more support by principals for a teacher middle school certification than there is by teachers. Second, there is more support for middle school certification for principals by teachers than by principals. Third, a middle school certification for counselors is favored only by the teachers.

Further results reveal that there is strong agreement by teachers and principals that the granting of middle school certification should be accomplished through a process whereby such certification would be added to an elementary or secondary certification.

In summary, results of this study clearly point out that whether or not one favors middle school certification appears to be directly related to the educational position of the individual. That is, teachers appear less to see a need for middle school certification for themselves, but do see a need for principals and counselors to obtain one. On the other hand, principals see a need for teachers to obtain a middle school certificate but do not support the belief that counselors or principals need to possess one.

This finding, although not surprising as additional coursework can be costly and timely, is significant as it may be one of the major reasons why teachers and principals working in middle level grades have been slow to recognize the need for middle school certification. Perhaps if those working in middle level schools were to develop a better understanding of the purposes, philosophy, and curriculum of middle schools as well as to possess a strong commitment to excellence in education, they would see a greater need for middle school certification.

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MIDDLE GRADE EDUCATION QUESTIONNAIRE

Check one: _____Teacher _____Principal

Circle type of school: Elementary Middle Jr. High Other

Circle level(s): Grade level(s) taught: 6 7 8

State Current Certification: _____

DIRECTIONS: Each item contains a major factor concerning middle grade education. Circle the response (SA - strongly agree; A - agree; N - no opinion; D - disagree; SD - strongly disagree) which most accurately reflects your opinion concerning each item.

I. CERTIFICATION

1.	There should be specific certification requirements for middle grade principals separate from elementary and secondary certification requirements.	SA	A	N	D	SD
2.	There should be specific certification requirements for middle grade counselors separate from elementary and secondary certification requirements.	SA	A	N	D	SD
3.	There should be specific certification requirements for middle grade teachers separate from elementary and secondary certification requirements.	SA	A	N	D	SD
4.	Middle grade certification should be accomplished through a program of academic course offerings leading to a degree in middle grade education.	SA	A	N	D	SD
5.	Middle grade certification should be accomplished through a program of additional course offerings leading to a middle grade validation sticker added to an elementary or secondary certificate.	SA	A	N	D	SD

II. TEACHER PREPARATION

1.	Teachers preparing for middle grade certification should have course offerings dealing with the physical, intellectual, social, and emotional development of middle grade children.	SA	A	N	D	SD
2.	Teachers preparing for middle grade certification should have course offerings dealing with the psychology of learning and behavior as it applies to middle grade children.	SA	A	N	D	SD
3.	Teachers preparing for middle grade certification should have course offerings dealing with the history, philosophy, and purposes of middle grade education.	SA	A	N	D	SD

4.	Teachers preparing for middle grade certification should have the same course offerings in special methods of teaching that is provided for elementary and secondary teachers.	SA	A	N	D	SD
5.	Teachers preparing for middle grade certification should have course offerings in special methods of teaching in middle grades.	SA	A	N	D	SD
6.	Teachers preparing for middle grade certification should have course offerings in a variety of teaching strategies (methods).	SA	A	N	D	SD
7.	Teachers preparing for middle grade certification should have course offerings in methods of individualized instruction.	SA	A	N	D	SD
8.	Teachers preparing for middle grade certification should have course offerings in principles of guidance and counseling which pertain to middle grade children.	SA	A	N	D	SD
9.	Teachers preparing for middle grade certification should have course offerings in affective education (values and attitude development).	SA	A	N	D	SD
10.	Teachers preparing for middle grade certification should have course offerings in reading in the content areas as it pertains to middle grade teaching.	SA	A	N	D	SD
11.	Teachers preparing for middle grade certification should have courses in remedial reading.	SA	A	N	D	SD
12.	Teachers preparing for middle grade certification should have course offerings in principles of classroom management (discipline).	SA	A	N	D	SD
13.	Teachers preparing for middle grade certification should have course offerings in learning theory and psychology in the classroom.	SA	A	N	D	SD
14.	Teachers preparing for middle grade certification should have course offerings in the psychology of the middle grade child.	SA	A	N	D	SD
15.	Teachers preparing for middle grade certification should have one field of an academic major with one field of an academic minor.	SA	A	N	D	SD
16.	Teachers preparing for middle grade certification should have one field of an academic major with two fields of an academic minor.	SA	A	N	D	SD
17.	Teachers preparing for middle grade certification should have field experiences in middle grades prior to student teaching.	SA	A	N	D	SD